



"The planters were not energetic cotton-growers."

UNDER THE OLD CODE

BY REBECCA HARDING DAVIS

THE first years of my life were passed in one of the Gulf States, in a district given up to cotton-plantations. In the middle of these plantations, in a wide basin formed by the sloping hills, lay the village of Big Spring. The spring was a huge gush of brown water which made itself into a creek and lapped its crooked way through the woods. Beside it stood a large building which had belonged to one of Aaron Burr's confederates when he planned his great empire. The would-be Duke and all of his race were dead now. His palace had a stable in one end, and in the other a squalid store where everything could be bought, from a plough to stale sugar-plums, and the pelts brought by the Indian tribe that lingered on the other side of the hills.

Along the grassy road which led from the store were the forge, the house of Barret the horse-trader, the shoemaker's cabin, and the tavern, kept by Ody Peay. No decent traveller had ever been known to stay overnight in Ody's dirty, dark chambers. But the foremost men and the best judges of liquor in the State came to try his mint juleps and sherry cobbler. You would hear no better talk in the South than that which purled lazily along on a rainy afternoon on Ody's gallery.

This was Big Spring village. The woods crept in year by year as if they

wanted to close down on it altogether and smother out its torpid life; live-oaks grew in the midst of the streets; the moss covered the roofs and edged the huge trough into which the water from the spring dripped, and about which the sleepy oxen stood in the hot sunshine and drank lazily.

Some of the planters who daily rode into Big Spring for a smoke and gossip at Ody's were the descendants of good Protestant Irish families; and others, still Catholic, traced back their ancestry to French émigrés who had escaped the guillotine.

The planters were not energetic cotton-growers. Most of their capital and knowledge went into their stables, in which were some of the most famous running-horses in the country. Their owners travelled every year with them, and a great following of friends, jockeys, and grooms, to New Orleans and up to the Northern race-courses. The Southern king of the turf, Gray Eagle, was partly owned by Major Delasco, one of our neighbors, though Kentucky claimed the great racer, and was as proud of him as of any of her sons, Marshall or Clay though he might be. When Kentucky was challenged by Louisiana on the course in 1840, it was Gray Eagle who was chosen to uphold its honor. The whole country stood breathless as that race was

run. The Major backed the horse with every dollar and acre that he owned. Thousands of Kentuckians risked their whole fortunes on him, and when it was certain that he would lose, not a man from that State, to save himself, would bet a penny against him. The ruin of many an old family dated from that race.

In his old age the great Southern champion was taken by Major Delasco to the course at Lexington, where his chief triumphs had been won. When the races were over, the audience waited in silence while the old horse, blind and tottering, was led in. He was stripped; the bugle sounded the start. He understood. His sightless eyes kindled, his nostrils quivered as he was led around the course. Roar after roar of frantic shouts greeted him; every head was uncovered. He stepped slowly and proudly, his head high, his breath coming hard.

He knew that he was the conqueror, and that these were his friends come to welcome him. Twice he marched around the track, and then passed out of sight forever.

"He knows!" the Major said as he led him out, patting him with a shaking hand. "He knows it's the last time. He has bid the world good-by." The tears ran down over his huge tobacco-stained jaws as he talked.

Gray Eagle died two days later.

I have often heard my mother describe the mixed magnificence and squalor of the life on the plantations among which we lived; the great one-storied wooden houses built on piles; the pits of mud below them in which the pigs wallowed; the masses of crimson roses heaped high on the roofs, a blaze of pure and splendid color; the bare floors, not too often scrubbed; the massive buffets covered with magnificent plate, much of it cups and salvers won on the turf. The women of these families did not lead the picturesque idle life which their Northern sisters imagined and envied. Much of the day was spent in weighing provisions or cutting out clothes for the field-hands. They had few books—an odd volume of poems and their Bibles, which they read devoutly—and no amusements but an occasional hot supper, to which they went in faded gowns of ancient cut. But their jewels, as a rule, were diamonds of great purity and value.

In our quiet life afterwards in Virginia,

our sojourn in the far South was remembered as an uneasy dream. The thick shade of the semi-tropical forests, the mile-long hedges of roses through which crawled rattlesnakes and the deadly upland moccasin, the darting birds like jewels, the extravagant slovenliness of both nature and man, the fleas, the ticks, the chiggers, and countless other creatures that bite and sting, and through all and over all the intolerable heat, made up for us children a strange enchanted page of the family history.

The planters welcomed strangers with ardent kindness. They served God with the same fervor. Dancing and card-playing were regarded as devices of the devil, the Southern "church member" being then, as now, much more strict in abjuring these carnal delights than is the descendant of the Puritan.

While we were in this neighborhood Major Delasco's wife gave a small supper, after which there was a carpet-dance. On the following Sunday there was a celebration of the Holy Communion in the Presbyterian church of which she was a member. When she went, according to custom, for a silver token admitting her to the tables, it was refused. Early on Monday morning the Major sent a challenge to each of the elders and members of the session, eighteen in all. Most of the men whom he had challenged were his cronies, with whom he supped daily, and exchanged gossip, receipts for drinks, or the eggs of fancy poultry.

"None of the hounds will dare to back out of a duel on the score of religion," he said. "They're not sunk quite so low as that. Some of them 'll hit me, no doubt. I make sure of that. D'ye see how Tiger keeps to heel and never lifts his eyes off me? Dogs know, sir!" The stout old man stopped to pat the dog, winking hard. "Fond of your master, eh, you brute? Well, this week 'll see the end of Tom Delasco. But I shall have vindicated Maria's honor, thank God!"

This washing of reputations clean by blood was going on perpetually.

On the day when my father first arrived at the village he was passing down the street when he observed that a gentleman was following him rapidly. He halted. Coming abreast of him, the man drew a pistol and pointed it at his head. Naturally he started back.

"Thank you, sir," said the stranger,



"SHE HAD A VERY TRYIN' EXPERIENCE, POH CHILD!"

courteously. "It is the gentleman on the other side of the street I wish to shoot."

He pulled the trigger, and the gentleman on the other side fell dead, with the bullet in his heart. During the next six months more than thirty men were shot on that same grassy highway. Every one of these deaths was the outcome of the creed which rated honor higher than life—a creed which scarcely has a place among the motives of any man nowadays. One fact which I myself remember will show how stringent it was then.

There was a county family whom I shall call Impey, because that was not their name, and because they claimed descent from Sir Elijah Impey, the judge in India famous as the murderer of Nancomar. Some French blood of a finer strain than that of the English butcher had some time been mixed in the race.

One branch of the family ended in an old man of eighty, his granddaughter, a delicate girl of sixteen, and her baby brother.

Many years after we had left the neighborhood, one of the planters, Judge Ma-bury, with his wife, visited us on their way home from the Springs. They had much to tell us of our old friends.

"And Mary Impey?" some one asked at last.

"Oh, little Mary?" exclaimed Mrs. Ma-bury. "She had a very tryin' experience, poh child! But it all ended right. You know she lived alone with her grandfather and little brother quite remote. She heard one day that Colonel Dupree had spoken—well, coarsely of her. I caln't go into details. The remark left a stain on her character. She heard it in the mohnin', an' she considered about it. She had no father. Willy was only seven; thah was nobody but her grandfather, an' he was imbecile. So she called foh her pony an' rode into the village, an' stopped at the tahvern, where the Colonel was likely to be. Some gentlemen she knew were on the gallery. 'Is Colonel Dupree inside?' she said, very scared to speak out before them all. So they called him, and then came around the horse to talk to Miss Mary.

"When he came out o' the doh, smil-in' and bowin', she said, 'Colonel, I've been told you spoke of me yesterday in wolds that I can't repeat. Thah's no man to come an' ask about it. What grounds had you foh speaking of me so?'"

"He couldn't deny it in the face of the men standin' thah who had heard him, so he said: 'I was drunk when I did that. 'Fore Almighty God, Miss Mary,' he said, solemnly, 'thah's no ground foh it. Thah's no woman in the State more deservin' of honor than you.'

"That is enough foh me," she said. "Now, foh you—" She put her hand in her pocket and took out a little pistol and shot him through the head. Then she rode back home again."

"She killed him! Didn't they arrest her?" I cried.

"Arrest her? Why, you don't understand. Thah was nobody to do it but her. Of course she was sorry about it," said my friend, stroking the fringe of her over-skirt, "but it had to be done. She married soon after that. Oh, I forgot to tell you," she pattered on, smiling. "Little Willy cried when he understood whah Mary had been. 'That was my business, sister,' he said. Bless the child! Of cohse, if he had been a little bigger— But they would probably have disarmed the boy, and not have given him fair play."

And as she talked my mind swung dizzily back to the old point of view. What, after all, was the Colonel's life, or any life, if honor was at stake?

"Poh Mary!" Aunt Dody was saying. "She's dead now. Died six years ago, just tired out. Her husband was a rampagious kind of creature, and so were her daughters. Mary was always a timid little body, and she spent her life tryin' to make the world easy for them."

"Did she ever regret what she had done?"

"Oh no! Why, certainly not! I never heard her speak of Colonel Dupree but once. She said: 'I am sorry, Aunt Dody, it was I who had to do that. He made great mischief in the world. But perhaps he's doin' better now—elsewhere.' Perhaps he is," sighed Aunt Theodora, doubtfully shaking her head.

"Of course you remember," said the Judge, now joining in the discussion, "that there was a strained feeling between the Impeys and the Delascos?"

"A vendetta—yes. Is it still going on?"

"Well, we don't call it that. Vendetta's too big a name. The low-class whites in your Virginia hills here have vendettas, and are always in the papers. Thah was just a—difficulty between those fam-

ilies. They said little about it, but it has been going on since the opening up of the country. Thah don't seem to have been any reason foh it—no insult—nothing tangible. But the two families are different, and apparently they can't tolerate each other on the same earth. Foh fifty years not a Delasco died in his bed. Yes, they certainly ran it pretty hard then."

As he spoke, the forgotten story came back to me. Neither family had allowed the feud to absorb their lives. They were planters, lawyers, or speculators, many of them busy and useful men. But when one of their natural enemies came on their path they rid it of him as they would of any other noxious vermin. Their neighbors had always looked on with mild regret. It was a pity, they thought, that two such important and agreeable families felt it to be their duty to kill each other on sight. But nothing could have been more underbred than interference, in our code.

"There are families," the Judge said, ponderously, "that die of consumption, and some are mowed down by scrofula. But it doesn't seem to be God's law that an Impey or a Delasco should die of disease. They were meant to make an end of each other. And of cohse you can't run against God's law."

"What became of Major Delasco?" I asked. "When we left Big Spring he had eighteen duels on hand."

The Judge laughed. "Oh, he came through them without a scratch, and others—others. Gentlemen shot wide with the Major. He was a friendly old soul, pottering about, always bragging of his fancy poultry or his brew of apple toddy. One of the Texas Impeys made an end of him. Picked a quarrel on the road, and used his knife on the old man. I never asked the details. I couldn't hear them. The Major's death was a great shock to me—a great shock."

"And then? The Texas Impey?"

"Well, of course the Major's sons set out at once after him. But Dan, their old coachman, met him on the street in Huntsville next day, and shot him on sight. He was the last of that branch, fortunately. A bad lot."

"Then the Impey family is extinct?"

"No. There's Willy, Mary's brother," said Mrs. Mabury.

"He might be the brother of every other woman. They all make much of him,"

growled the Judge, with a sniff. "But there! I've nothing to say against Willy. He's a pleasant, affectionate lad. But somehow he'll never raise any cotton."

Mrs. Mabury made haste to tell us that after his sister's death young Impey unfortunately "lived in northern States, Virginia and Kentucky, and had learned their ways." He had few affiliations with Big Spring. "The Delascoes have taken possession there," she said, with a shrug; "they run the country and the church as well as their horses, and as profitably."

"Now, don't scratch, Theodora," said the Judge. He then, with judicial gravity, went on to tell us that nature, apparently on purpose, had made the difference very marked between the two families. "The Impeys are light-weight men, fair-haired, easy-going, and full of fun. They're fond of pictures and music and so on. But the Delascoes are swarthy and stout-built, made up of big qualities good and bad, but big. Like a Roman wall," the Judge said, a little diffident with his classic simile. "Rubble, you know—rough lumps of good rock and of mud mixed all together."

"You'll see Willy if you go to the mountains next week," Mrs. Mabury struck in, eagerly, when the Judge stopped for breath. "There is to be a convention of railway men there. You know Willy is a railway man."

"In business!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, Impey has quite the Northern cast of mind," the Judge replied. "He has ability, no doubt, and energy. You always hear of him dashing into this enterprise or that."

But somehow nothing comes out of it. No, he'll bring no crops to the market. He may plant and hoe and water, but he'll raise no cotton."

Presently, when the Judge had gone out of our hearing, Aunt Dody again began to talk of her hero. "It really is incomprehensible why Willy does not get on!" she said, anxiously.

"Does he drink?"

"Not more than a gentleman should—at the dinner table, you know. He's a fine judge of Madeira. He plays high, but never, strictly speaking, gambles either. No, really, he has none of those weaknesses. And he tries so hard! You see, it is such a necessity that Willy should get on."

"Is there a woman in the case?" we ventured.

"Oh dear yes! Louisa Payne. Have you never heard? Willy has been waiting on her for five

years. You know the Payne girls were orphans, left in the care of Miss Ann Sage. Don't you remember Miss Ann—tall, hawk-nosed old lady with a turban and a bead bag? Why, you must remember her! Jane Payne, the oldest niece, was grown and presented to society when Louisa was still a wee thing at school. Jane had two lovers. She went to her aunt. 'What am I to do, dear Aunt Ann?' she said.



"THERE WAS A STRAINED FEELING."

" 'I have looked into their properties,' said Miss Ann. 'We will marry Mr. Buchanan, Jane.'

" 'Very well, dear Aunt Ann,' said Jane.

"So she married Mr. Buchanan, and he took her to his plantation. Magnificent manor-house, trained servants, everything of the best. The next day Miss Ann arrives with her servants and dogs and horses. Just six months later Mr. Buchanan went to his wife, Miss Ann being present. 'To-morrow at noon,' he said, very distinctly, 'the coach will be at the door, and either Miss Ann Sage or I go away in it, *never to return*.' 'Very well, dear,' Jane said, and nothing more. The next morning Miss Ann went to her. 'Jane, you're a fool,' she says. 'Good-by.' So she went home, and gave her whole attention to Louisa. When the girl grew up, her aunt looked out for a fine match for her. But the only man she cared for was Willy Impey. Miss Ann said to him: 'I don't ask a great fortune for my niece; I've had enough of that; but I do require that you have an income which will maintain her comfortably.' That was little enough to ask, and so Willy acknowledged, and set out to make that income. Five years ago! It certainly is a mystery why that boy does not get on!" Her anxiety actually forced tears into her kind old eyes.

We went a week later, as usual, to the little summer resort among the mountains. I naturally looked around with some curiosity for the young man who had seated himself so deeply in the heart of my old friend. But there was no one who would answer to the description of Willy Impey.

It was the custom for the children, in full dress, to take possession of the ball-room every evening for an hour before the dancing began. The old negro fiddlers played for them, and they waltzed or danced Virginia reels, to the delight of a row of mothers and black *maumers* ranged around the wall. The young men and women seldom came into the children's frolic. I was a little surprised, therefore, one evening to see a young man dancing with them, showing the same grave courtesy to his tiny partners as though they had been duchesses. They were radiant with pleasure at being taken so seriously, and when the dance was over hung fondly about him. He

was a small, fair man. There was a hint of the same old-time punctilio in his elaborate dress and his deferential manner. When he came closer I saw that he was not young, but middle-aged, his light hair was gray, and there were tired lines on the sincere, homely face. It was oddly sincere, and one saw that the soul that had looked through it these forty years was as simple and fine as that of any child.

"That," said my neighbor, as he passed us, "is my friend Impey, one of the officers of our road."

My neighbor was John McCauley, controller of one of the railway systems in the South.

"Impey, eh?" said another business man, Reynolds, who was standing near. "Is he at a desk still?"

"Yes. I don't know why he doesn't move up. There's no man in the business who has more ideas than William Impey."

"It does you no good to have a dozen knives in your hand if you can't cut with them," rejoined the other, with a complacent chuckle.

"Impey has a knife in hand now that I fancy will cut," said Mr. McCauley, dryly. "He has an idea about the equalizing of rates all over the country which seems to me so valuable that I have contrived this conference of railway men that he may lay it before them."

"Equalizing of rates, eh?" Reynolds half shut his keen little eyes a moment, considering, but his round face never lost its fixed, unctuous smile. "I don't see how that could pay Bill Impey anything if it were done."

"Not in money. But to be known as the man who has solved that old riddle would be a sure step upward for him in the business."

"Well, look out that he is on hand when the conference comes off. He will probably have a picnic or ball to manage just then." He turned with a contemptuous grin to leave the ball-room, but, coming back, said, seriously: "Impey's too heavy a load for even you to lift, McCauley. I know him. He's the dregs of a worn-out family. Some parts of his brain stopped growing when he was sixteen. You had better drop him."

Mr. McCauley looked attentively at the man as he swaggered out. "It is strange how such an underbred fellow can push up and up in this country!" he said. "I

am sorry I mentioned William's plan to him."

A few minutes later Mr. Impey came up. He had a peculiar thin voice with womanish, uncertain inflections in it.

"I have made a terrible mistake," he told us, eagerly. "I just spent an hour teaching little Mary Page to reverse, and now I find that her mother did not wish her to learn the American step. And I can't undo it!" looking from one to the other anxiously.

Mr. McCauley stared at him. "What difference does it make?" he said.

"Why, McCauley! I ought not to spoil the child's step!" he exclaimed. "But I must go now. I promised to make paper flowers for some of the girls."

Passing through one of the side rooms half an hour later, I saw him seated, surrounded by a group of gay, chattering girls, for whom he was making wreaths of flowers and chains of flying fairies from tissue-paper.

"You would take him for an idiot," began McCauley, angrily, but suddenly checked himself as we met a short, fair girl who was entering the room. "Mr.

Impey," he said, bowing to her, "is, as usual, the bee among the blossoms, Miss Payne."

"Yes, Willy never tires of amusing young people," she said, smiling calmly; and passing on, seated herself among the gray old matrons who were watching the dancers. She bowed and smiled to each of them, and I was impressed by the perfect correctness of each smile in the de-

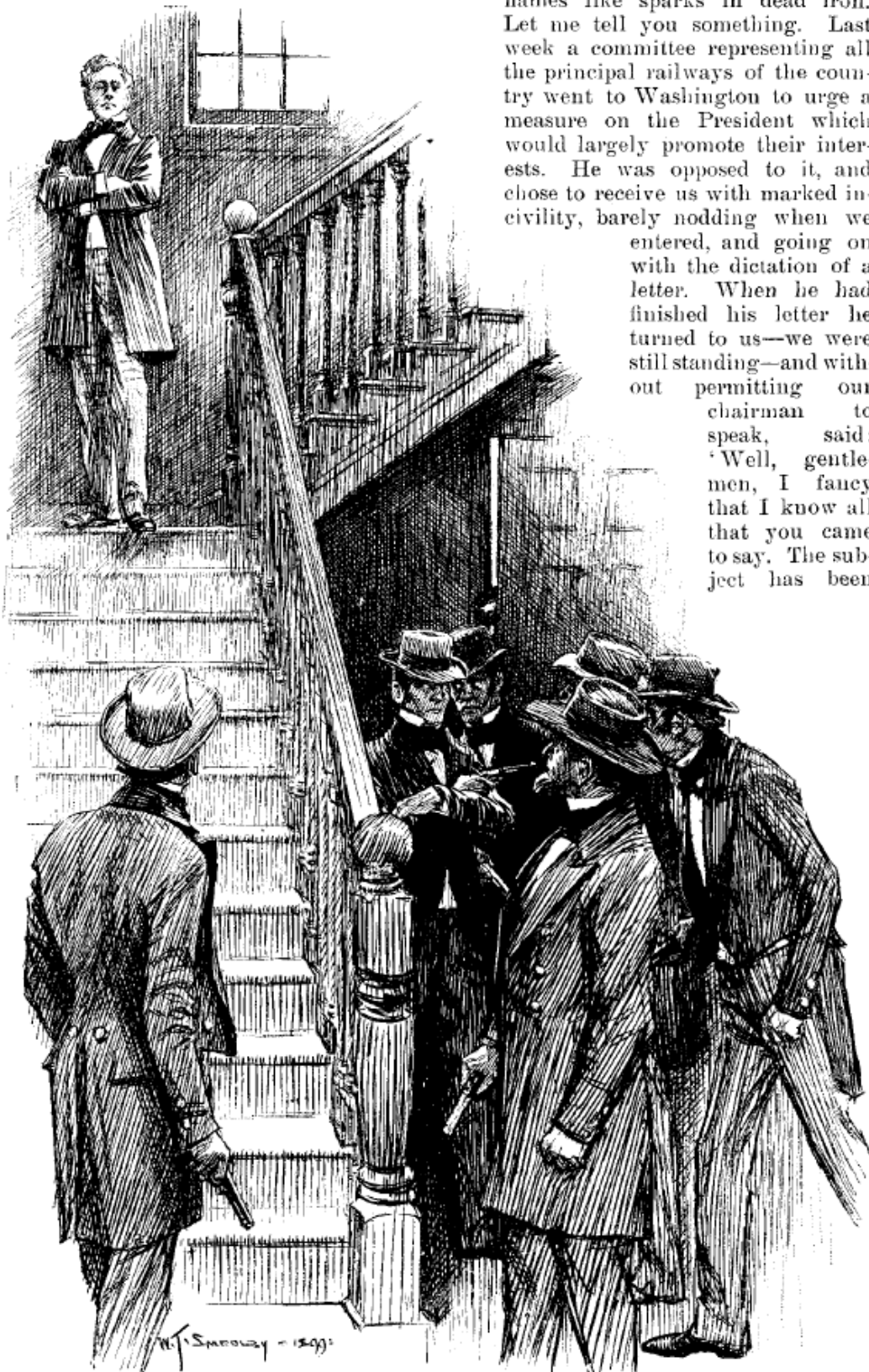
gree of respect it expressed. People might differ as to the beauty of the plump little woman sitting there, with unchanging pink cheeks and pale blue eyes, but nobody could doubt that whatever she said or thought was correct, and that if she lived for centuries she would go on doing the same things with perfect satisfaction in herself. If a button should drop off her glove it would distress her as much as if



"SHE ROSE AND WALKED AWAY WITH HIM."—[PAGE 410.]

she broke a commandment. But neither accident was possible. There were no accidents in Louisa Payne's well-ordered life.

"Yes," said Mr. McCauley, who had followed my eyes. "That is not exactly the kind of woman to be kept waiting for five years while a man cuts paper angels. But Impey is not a fool. He has genuine fire in him, and sometimes it



flames like sparks in dead iron. Let me tell you something. Last week a committee representing all the principal railways of the country went to Washington to urge a measure on the President which would largely promote their interests. He was opposed to it, and chose to receive us with marked incivility, barely nodding when we entered, and going on with the dictation of a letter. When he had finished his letter he turned to us—we were still standing—and without permitting our chairman to speak, said: 'Well, gentlemen, I fancy that I know all that you came to say. The subject has been

"I AM HERE, GENTLEMEN!"—[PAGE 412.]

fully laid before me. I imagine I am able to comprehend it without any instructions. It is not necessary to waste your time, or mine."

"Wright, our spokesman, is a slow man. He turned angrily on his heel and was making for the door, and we all probably would have followed him; but Impey, who was there as my secretary, stepped quietly to the front. Willy would be at ease and calm in the court of the Cæsars. He said, 'My name is Impey, Mr. President,' and then, leaning with both knuckles on the table, stooped forward, and said, in a low, distinct voice, 'I think you do not understand. These are the controllers of all the principal railway systems of the United States. They hold in their hands more actual power than does its President. The government cannot afford to refuse them a hearing.' He stepped back, motioning to us to come up, as if he had been the herald to announce us. Well—you know what the President is—an underbred man, always uncertain of himself. He was terribly confused, tried to joke it off, and was anxious in his civility. We transacted our business satisfactorily. But the man who controlled the situation was William Impey. When a great occasion comes, he rises to it. I have hopes that this conference on Wednesday will be the making of him. It is the chance of his life for him to show what is in him."

Mr. Impey's five-year-old romance was known to everybody at the Springs. They gossiped incessantly of the iron will of Miss Ann and of Willy's shortcomings. "The poor fellow," I was assured, "is always on the verge of success. He discovers an idea in May which will bring him in a fortune in July. But when it turns out worthless in June he is gay and rejoicing because he has found out a new trick in whist. But poor Louisa sees no fault in him."

But who could tell what Louisa's pale blue eyes saw? Sometimes I suspected that the iron in Miss Sage's blood was in the veins also of her placid niece, and that if she chose she would marry her lover to-morrow. She did not choose. She loved him, and did not care whether the whole world knew it. Whenever he came near to her the sudden blood flamed in her head and throat, and her eyes glowed with passionate fire. But as soon as he spoke the passion faded out

of them, and they watched him, critical and cool. There was a tough fibre of common-sense in this blond little woman which was lacking among Willy's flabby qualities.

One morning a sparrow badly wounded fluttered into the path before us. Willy picked it up, stroking its feathers softly with little crooning noises. His lips quivered. "It hurts one so to see a dumb thing suffer!" he said, looking up.

"Then put an end to its suffering," said Miss Payne, promptly; and taking the bird, she squeezed its throat tightly between her fingers, and threw it into the bush.

He shuddered, and she looked at him perplexed.

There was to be a picnic on Tuesday. She was sitting with me when he ran to her with his gloves to mend.

"You are not going!" she said.

"Oh, Louisa! Why not?" he pleaded, looking at the sweep of cool forest and the mountain-peak beyond, still wrapped in mist. "Think of the view from Old Shaggy! I have just saddled the gray pony for you. I will walk beside you. We have gone to Old Shaggy together every year!"

"Yes, but the conference to-morrow? You ought to look over your notes to-day. You said you were not clear on some points."

"Oh, those are mere practical details. Any drudge can straighten them out. Come, where shall I find your wraps?"

They went. The other older men left the preparations to the young people, but Impey packed and cooked more anxiously than any boy there.

I remember another incident of the day. Miss Payne was sitting with me a little apart under the trees when we saw a commotion among the men, and Willy ran from them to us.

"Oh, Louisa! Louisa!" he panted. His face had lost all color, and his jaws worked excitedly.

"What has happened?" she said, coldly.

"A copperhead! A snake! Get up! There may be one under that shawl. Come out to that open field. We shall be safe there."

She did not move. "Why didn't you help kill the snake?" she said, holding his wandering eyes with her own.

"Why didn't I kill the copperhead?" laughing shrilly. "Because I was afraid."

I can't see anything die, and I don't want to die myself."

He leaned against a tree, glancing suspiciously about. He was wholly unnerved; the drops of cold sweat came out on his forehead, and when he tried to talk he broke into hysteric laughter. "This thing called courage that we make so much of in the South," he said, turning to me, "I haven't got it. The very thought of death makes me sick and shake like a rabbit."

"Mr. Impey, of course you understand, is only joking," Miss Payne said, quietly. She rose and walked away with him, and kept him apart during the day. I remember having an odd fancy that if the girl could have put some of her own blood into his paler veins she would have done it—she loved him enough.

Early the next morning two other railway magnates arrived. Reynolds mounted guard at the door of the little parlor where the conference was to be held, and McCauley bustled up and down anxiously.

"Where on earth is Impey? Oh, here you are! Good-morning, Miss Payne. Come, William, we are waiting for you."

The face of the little man was grave, and for the first time I saw in it the power and distinction in which his friend put such trust.

Miss Payne walked beside him to the door, and laid her hand on his arm. "Remember what depends on this morning," she said, in her gentle, steady tone.

At the first sound of it Mr. Impey threw up his head impatiently, like a horse that felt the curb.

"I know. It is a great chance for me," he said. "I'll go in now, Louisa."

But she still kept her soft hold on his arm. "It is the last chance," she said, slowly. "Five years is a long time. I have been patient. But I'm tired."

"Bless my soul, Lou! Why, you are all broken down! Your jaws are livid. Go to your room, child. Tut, tut! Women are so foolish and tender. Why, of course I'm going to do the best I can! Go in, go in. After all, the world won't come to an end this morning. Come, Mr. McCauley, I'm ready."

"It is the last chance," she said again, in her low, unchanging voice, and then, turning away, she walked to an arbor and sat down out of sight in the shelter of the grape-vines.

The door of the yellow parlor remained closed for two hours. It opened at last, and Mr. McCauley came out. There was a scowl on his good-humored face. He came up to me where I sat apart.

"The plan was a failure?" I asked.

"No, not at all. But Impey—oh, I give him up! He explained his theory fully and clearly. He has great control of language, you know. The thing was forcibly put before them. They caught on to it at once. But I don't think he personally impressed them favorably. His size and womanish voice, and the simple fine manner that you and I like—well, they're hard-headed business men, and he is not in their class. But that was nothing. Old Boskirk, who is as sharp as a steel trap, interrupted him and asked about some item of outlay. 'That,' said Willy, 'is one of the practical details about which I am not yet clear. I have talked the matter over fully with Mr. Reynolds, however, and he says there is no difficulty there.' On which, as I'm a living man, that sneak Reynolds stepped forward and said, 'My solution of that difficulty is' so and so, and 'The other items of outlay I should meet' in such a way, and so on, fluent and at home in every detail, until the men gathered around him discussing it and arguing with him. When I came out, he was talking of 'My plan,' and Willy Impey sat alone in a corner smoking his cigar. I give him up!"

The other men came out just then, talking loudly and hurrying to the train.

Mr. Boskirk halted. "Good-by, Mr. McCauley. Look me up when you're in Chicago. Do you know, that is a very clever plan. I should not be surprised if it would go some day."

"It is Impey's idea, you understand?"

"Impey? Oh, yes. The little man who introduced it? Yes, he has the theory, but Reynolds has worked it out. He's practical. Remarkable fellow, eh? He'll forge ahead with ideas like that. I wish we had him on the X and Y. Well, good-by—good-by!"

Reynolds, fat, hot, and perspiring, stood in the midst of the group shaking hands and shouting out good-byes and jokes. Willy too was with them. His whole body sagged a little, as if some stiffening had gone out of it, but, taking each man to be his own guest, he stood, the typical Southern host, cordial and smiling, until

the last one was gone. Then he turned and went slowly to the arbor.

After a long time he came out with Miss Payne. He was talking vehemently, but Louisa stood silent, the placid half-smile upon her face more defined than usual. A wind was stirring, but it did not disarrange the straight folds of her white draperies, or lift a hair of the glossy yellow coils upon her head. As she listened she waved a large white fan steadily to and fro.

Suddenly he turned and came toward us. She followed with unwilling steps.

"Here is McCauley!" he said, hoarsely. "He knows me. He knows what is in me. Let this man and woman judge between us. They are human—they're flesh and blood. They're not like you. Let them judge between us."

"Really," said Miss Payne, "this is all very unseemly and unpleasant! More so for our friends even than for me—"

"Our relations are no secret," he interrupted, breathlessly. "She has closed them. She has broken with me because I failed to-day."

"To-day?" The waving of the white fan stopped. Her pale eyes flashed. "When have you not failed?"

The little man cowered as if he had been struck.

"You are brutal, Miss Payne," cried McCauley. "You do not know Willy."

"Yes, I know him." She came closer to Willy, her voice hardly above a whisper. "Not for five years, but—I loved you, Willy, when we were children together. I've been waiting and hoping all my life. My husband must be a man. I'll speak now—as you have chosen to drag this thing out to strangers. You grow weaker as you grow older. I've waited and hoped for the man in you to come to light. But it never will. I'm tired." The pink flush had left her cheeks at last. She was suddenly a pinched, middle-aged woman.

"I'll never disappoint you again, Louisa," he said. "I can satisfy you, and I will! I'll do—something. My God! don't you believe me?"

She waited a minute, gathering her strength. "No," she said at last. "It is all over now. If you will excuse me, I will go in." She bowed courteously, forcing the usual smile to her ghastly face, and waved the white fan steadily as she went up the hill.

Willy looked after her, made an irresolute step or two as if to follow, and then turned back. He lighted a cigar, and the next moment it dropped from his shaking fingers on the grass. Then he turned to McCauley with a loud laugh.

"Did you hear her? She's disappointed in me! Am I pleased with myself? Is it a comfortable thing to know you're a botch of a man? It's in me to be something. You know that, Mac. You have faith in me. I've met men who are called great in this country, and not one had better stuff in him than I have. God knows I've tried. But there are things that drag me down. It's like mud clogging my legs at every step. She's right. Here I am at forty—Willy Impey, the old beau, cackling, contemptible, and so it'll be to the end. Well, good-morning," and lifting his hat, he left us, trying to walk jauntily up the hill.

"Now," said Mr. McCauley, "he has gone to the bar-room to forget his troubles. Yes, of course it's disgusting. But what can you do? It's an old story. A big soul strangled to death in the weaknesses of inherited temperament. The follies of his grandmothers and the drunkenness of his grandfathers! How can he fight them? I saw a Chinese picture once of a man caught in the hundred claws of a cuttle-fish, that were dragging him down—down. It's the same thing." He sat silent awhile. "Well, thank God he's rid of Louisa Payne. She would only have dragged him down the sooner."

Miss Payne, with her maid, took the evening train to New Orleans. Willy came the next morning to bid us good-by.

He was cheerful, even gay. "I will not follow her—no," he said. "Not until I have succeeded. I have a plan. Something quite new. Oh, you will hear of me before long!" and went away laughing, followed by all the children, who escorted him to the train.

I never saw him afterwards. It was from Mrs. Mabury, on her annual visit three years later, that I heard of him again.

The Judge, as soon as Willy Impey's name was mentioned, made an excuse and left the room, and Aunt Theodora, in a frightened whisper, and keeping watch on the door, told us the end of the story.

"Poor Willy! I know you want to hear, and nobody knows the truth about him so well as I. You see, when he left the Springs he resigned his position on the

railway, saying he had proved his unfitness for business. He was apparently then in deadly earnest. He set himself body and soul to work so as to win Louisa back. Of course he had jokes and learned songs—it wouldn't have been Willy if he hadn't. As for drink—he didn't take to it regularly—no. But occasionally, of course—

"He owned a large tract at Big Spring, and he decided to come back and raise cotton. He wasn't goin' to do it in the old way, either. He looked into the new methods, and hired an expert as overseer, and spent what little he had in machinery and the like. Well, the overseer arrived and began work. Willy was to come next week. But, you see, in all these years the Delascos had seated themselves firmly at the Spring. They used the old methods, and the word got about that this Impey fellow meant to run them out with his modern improvements. The Judge heard the storm risin', and he wrote to Willy beggin' him not to come. 'Foh God's sake,' he said, 'don't open up the old grudge! Thah'll be trouble!' But Willy appeared on the day set, smilin' and funnin' away as usual. 'Pretty talk,' he says, 'that a man can't fahm his own ground as he likes in this year of the nineteenth century in a Christian community. Why, bless yoh soul, Aunt Dody, I've no grudge against the Delascos!' he says. But the Delascos met in their houses an' woked each other up to fury. It wasn't Willy's fahm they were against; it was Willy. They are reasonable men—some of them. But it was the old hate comin' up again in their blood. They couldn't help it, I suppose. Well—" she glanced around, suddenly pale and trembling, "it was done, an' I—was thah."

"You?"

"Yes. I heard what was planned early in the mornin'. The Judge had gone to the city, so I went myself to the tavern whah Willy was. Ody Peay's, you know. Only it's another house, an' Ody's dead. Willy was upstahs eatin' his breakfast. He laughed at me. I told him they said he should not leave the town alive. 'Dear Aunt Dody,' he said, 'they've been scaring you because you're a woman.'

"Then the landlord, Pomeroy, come in, out of breath. 'Mr. Impey,' he said, 'the Delascos are below in the hall—six of them. They sent word foh you to come down. Every man of 'em has his

gun!' Willy stood up. He had no blood in his face. You know Willy never was a fighter. 'I am not armed, Mr. Pomeroy,' he said. 'Do the gentlemen know that?' 'Yes. They don't keer. They bid me tell you thah was but one Impey livin', and the earth was tired of carryin' him.' Pomeroy ran into a back room. 'Hyah, sir,' he says; 'thah's a ladder down into the kitchen. I can hide you in the cellar. Come. Thah's a chance!' Willy ran to the ladder, an' then stopped. 'Louisa wouldn't have me skulk like a rat in a hole,' he said, standin' thah.

"I was so wild I ran out on the stairs. They were all below. 'Men,' I screamed, 'are you goin' to murder him in cold blood? Six against one! Are you devils?' I don't know what I said to them.

"Old John Delasco answered me. 'Madam Mabury,' he said, 'go back. Don't meddle hyah. It's the last of a bad breed goin' to be wiped out!' An' that man had eaten at my table an' walked with me to church!

"I went back. Willy was standin' thah. His thin little face was like that of a corpse. I begged him to go down the ladder. It would have been a sure escape. But he shook his head.

"Lou will be satisfied with this,' he said. 'I couldn't live like a man, but I can die like one,' and he gave a queer smile. 'Tell Lou, Aunt Dody,' he said.

"Then he flung the door open and stopped at the head of the stairs.

"'I am here, gentlemen,' he said, drawing himself up, and he folded his arms and walked slowly down the steps.

"They let him come half-way, and then—

"The poor little man was lyin', all blood, where he fell when I ran down. I lifted his head in my arms, but he only spoke once. 'Tell Lou,' he said."

"And Louisa?" I asked, presently.

"She lives in New Orleans. She's busy with charities. Oh, she's a good woman, and very strong—very strong. Even Miss Ann falls into her ways. Now Willy never would have fallen into her ways. I doubt," said Aunt Dody, shaking her head, "whether Willy ever would have been very different here. But he was a dear boy. And perhaps," she said, after a while, looking wistfully into the far gray evening, "he's like Colonel Dupree—he's doin' better elsewhere."